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The Director of Central Intelligence

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National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence *2 JUL 1984*  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: NIO USSR/EE

SUBJECT: Soviet Initiative on ASAT/Space -- Political Slant

Summary

The Soviet ASAT/space proposal is clearly a tactical gambit against the Administration, notwithstanding Soviet long-term interests in constraining our military programs in this area.

Their initial negative handling of prompt but qualified US acceptance may signal a Soviet back-off, but more likely is aimed at playing "hard to get" and preparing Soviet domestic audiences more gradually for a shift in Soviet tactics.

This move raises the likelihood of additional moves to hurt the Administration, such as collapsing the talks later, should they get started.

To judge current and near-future Soviet behavior, as in the SNIE we have promised, your estimators have to be given a close reading of high-level US-Soviet diplomatic exchanges. For tactical, or internal political reasons, the Soviets are likely to send different signals through different media.

The Soviet proposal to open negotiations on an ASAT/space-weapons ban is certainly a tactic aimed at gaining some initiative on the peace front and embarrassing the Administration. The difficulties the Soviets have had in responding to US acceptance -- their refusal so far to accept yes for an answer -- shows the primacy of tactical considerations and also the sluggishness of Kremlin decisionmaking.

In my opinion, this Soviet move raises significantly the probability of additional Soviet moves before November to pressure, embarrass, or discredit the US Administration. This could involve a dramatic setback in the negotiations contrived by the Soviets but blamed on the US. Soviet characterization of the US response as a rejection, so far, looks like an effort to set up this kind of a scenario. We could also see the more

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confrontational "surprises" on regional security matters we have been worrying about lately. Notwithstanding the keen interest of the Soviets in using arms control politics or agreements to constrain US space weapons developments, their immediate and overriding interest is in exploiting the US political environment to hurt the Administration or bruise its mandate for anti-Soviet policies after November.

[ ] disagrees with this judgment. He believes the Soviet interest in some arms control handle on US space weapons activity is so strong that they will yield the President political benefits to get it.

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The Soviet proposal to talk, while clearly focused on their prime arms control concern at present, is obviously a tactical political gambit to a large extent. Its immediate public release on the Soviet side (rather than negotiating simultaneous announcements by both capitals), the accompanying propaganda about "militarization of space," the insistence on a total space-weapons ban, and the proposal for a reciprocal testing moratorium timed to impact on our fall ASAT testing all indicate to me the primacy of tactical calculation.

Pressure on the Soviets for such an initiative has been increasing since the turn of the year as evidence mounted that their uniform negativism toward the US was not paying satisfactory political dividends. Many Soviet spokesmen, from traveling physicists to Chernenko, signaled that ASAT/space was the area where the Soviets were most likely to move.

Tactical calculations may have delayed this initiative till now. One has the sense, however, that Soviet internal politics may have stood in the way. There is a theory at State that Gromyko pushed the "deep freeze" line to solidify his control over foreign policy tactics; having achieved that, he can now be more flexible. I think the "Gromyko-in-control" theory has always been a bit overdone. In any case, there is evidence of more assertiveness by Chernenko and Gorbachev on foreign policy recently, and a few other signs of political activism that suggest the possibility of a shifted decisionmaking constellation in the Politburo.

Soviet delay in publicizing US acceptance of their proposal, and then characterizing it for the time being as tantamount to rejection may spring, as some Moscow observers speculate, from Soviet surprise and unhappiness over so prompt a US response. Given their own view that the White House is now motivated by electioneering above all else, however, the Soviets must have allowed for rapid but qualified US acceptance. I believe we should not jump to the conclusion that the Soviets are so non

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plused that they will now back away from their proposal. Rather we should leave room for the likelihood that their initially negative handling of our positive response stems from a desire to keep the US in the role of supplicant and, of great importance, to prepare their own domestic audiences for a slight shift in the tactical situation.

The Soviets are currently dealing with two pressing interests:

- They have a strong desire to hurt the US administration as it moves toward the election, and certainly a well documented determination not to help it.
- The area where the Soviets most want to constrain our weapons development now is space.

The question is which of these has the higher priority in the short run.

If you believe that Soviet concern about space takes priority, as [ ] does (he'll give you his views in coming days, but I think it's important to capture their thrust here), the implication is that, after the opening theatrics are over, the Soviets will negotiate hard but fast toward some compromise of their desire for a total ban and our position that a high-altitude ban, an incidents-in-space deal, and some confidence-building measures are all that can usefully (and verifiably) be done. Doug sees both sides eager for a real compromise: The US for domestic political reasons; the Soviets to get the beginnings of control on our space programs. This view does not exclude the Soviets taking maximum bargaining advantage of likely disputes within the Administration. Nor does it rule out their trying to hurt the Administration by walking out dramatically if an attractive compromise is not forthcoming in the early fall.

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It does seem very unlikely, however, that the Soviets will allow the prospect and then the fact of space negotiations to create a positive political atmosphere for the President which helps him in November but does not yield major, irreversible concessions to their position.

My strong belief is that the Soviet desire to hurt the Administration takes precedence in the short run. I base this on the following:

- The volume and content of all reporting since Andropov's initial proposals about space weapons ban suggests the primacy of the larger anti-Reagan concern in Moscow.
- The way in which the Soviets have now proposed talks

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smells like a "set up," although their propaganda management in the last few days has been clumsy.

- Even if the Soviets are very effective bargainers with an Administration politically bent on any deal by November, it is very unlikely that an agreement will be reached which the Soviets can count on for years to come to seriously constrain all our ASAT-ABM-SDI programs.
- There is much more at stake here than US space weapons programs. A limited arms control deal on space before November will show that this Administration can manage US-Soviet relations constructively while also pursuing very anti-Soviet military and foreign policies. The Soviets would have very little confidence that progress on space arms control between now and November will fundamentally change the direction of US policies. On the contrary, it could confirm their wisdom.

This line of reasoning strongly implies we are in for a bumpy ride. The most likely prospect is a "walk out scenario" of some sort in which, because of its unwillingness to compromise or its internal bickering, Washington is made to appear responsible for another failed opportunity to improve East-West relations.

Less likely, but very worrisome, are scenarios in which the Soviets use the onset of apparently promising talks to distract US attention or muffle US responses to a confrontational Soviet initiative in one of the areas about which we have been concerned, Pakistan, Central America, Berlin, or the Gulf.

The Soviet decision to press for space talks may not rest on a firm choice as to which tactical path to follow. It could be based on no more than a desire to get out of the box of inflexibility the Soviets have been in and to test the environment for opportunities either to hurt the Administration or to advance important arms control aims. If the US sticks to its positions on space and linkage to offensive nuclear arms, then the Soviets will emphasize the former aim. If the US proves willing to make major concessions, then the latter aim will prevail. In my view, those concessions would have to be painfully major.

Another slant on the Soviet initiative deserves mention. It may be motivated in part to blunt the political effect of bad news which the Soviets know, or fear, could emerge on something else, e.g., the death of Sakharov. If such news should come out while arms control talks are impending, the Soviets may calculate that the US will either have to mute its response or, in shrinking back, take the blame in some quarters for exploiting

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the Sakharov issue to avoid arms talks it didn't really want in the first place.

Soviet behavior and propaganda in coming weeks will help clarify which track they think they are on. But we'll have to reach a collective judgment in the SNIE on the basis of very ambiguous evidence, and perhaps some strong differences about the relative balance between the two main Soviet motives in play.

It is now extremely important that the SNIE drafters, coordinators, and NFIB principals have a good understanding of what is going on in the highest diplomatic exchanges. So long as the Soviets remained in their very inflexible posture, we could make do with general assurances that there was nothing different going on at the highest levels from what we were seeing in other evidence. I said at the time (i.e., when we did the last SNIE) that this would change should the Soviets try to be more flexible and active. We are now likely to see distinct differences between what they say and how they say it at the top diplomatic levels, on one hand, and their public propaganda and their guidance to private communicators, on the other.

I shall work all the channels I can to get the needed access (mainly Undersecretary Armacost, Assistant Secretary Burt, and Ambassador Matlock on the NSC). I believe it is important, however, that you seek an early understanding with Secretary Shultz on what we can and cannot have access to.

*Dawn Lull for*  
Fritz W. Ermarth

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